

EAR LABS

Hearing Aid Center

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October, 10, 2000

Honorable Donna Shalala
Secretary of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W. Room 615F
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Shalala:

I am a small business owner in Lake San Marcos, California, providing hearing health care services to the area's hearing impaired. I am very concerned that the Food and Drug Administration is reportedly advocating changes to the current hearing aid regulations that would dramatically increase the cost of hearing health care and reduce access to hearing health care providers. Please consider the impact of this proposed hearing aid rule on the nation's hearing-impaired and on the nation's small business hearing health care providers, as required by the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act.

Hearing health care providers like me have been working with the FDA since 1993 to streamline the current FDA hearing aid regulations.. Now, just weeks before the election of a new Administration, FDA is rushing to put forth a proposal that could eliminate doctors and hearing aid specialists like me from the marketplace. FDA reportedly favors allowing each state to determine the conditions for dispensing hearing aids. This will create inconsistency and confusion and will launch a 50-state effort by audiologists to install themselves as the sole gatekeepers to hearing health care without any medical or health policy justification.

As you may have seen, the AARP recently published a Consumer Guide to Hearing Aids which found that "almost everyone with a hearing loss hears better with a hearing aid, yet only 20 percent of those who need a hearing aid have one." Please don't let the FDA erect unwarranted barriers, such as, eliminating doctors and hearing aid specialists as hearing aid dispensers or allow audiologists to charge for expensive tests that are not usually necessary for the dispensing of proper hearing assistance.

Please don't let the FDA publish its proposed hearing aid rule.

Sincerely,

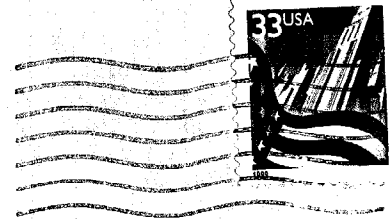


Anthony M. Moore
Hearing Aid Specialist, Lic. HA-2538

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EARLABS HEARING CENTER
1145 SAN MARINO DRIVE #115
LAKE SAN MARCOS CA 92069
(760) 744-1551



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